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CONTACTS:

Camilla Fox, 916/447-3085 x 215, chfox@earthlink.net

Geneva Page, 916/447-3085 x 208; 916/206-777 (cell); gpage@api4animals.org

ANIMAL PROTECTION INSTITUTE SAYS BILL WILL HARM WILDLIFE

Sacramento – Today, the **Animal Protection Institute** (API) condemned lawmakers for supporting legislation that would dramatically expand sport hunting in California. The bill, AB 396, passed the state Assembly last night by a 57-10 vote. In a letter to the Assembly, API said the bill would “harm wildlife, put additional burdens on the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) at a time when state agencies are scaling back on staff and programs, and undermine conservation of biological diversity.” Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D), who led an unsuccessful effort to defeat the bill, charged that AB 396 was fiscally irresponsible and would ultimately hurt taxpayers.

“At a time when state departments are struggling with unprecedented budget cuts, and my Republican colleagues are beating the drum about spending cuts and smaller government, I'm surprised AB 396 even got into print,” said Assemblyman Koretz. “This bill essentially turns Fish & Game into a dating service for hunters and their prey. They would be pimping at taxpayer expense.”

The bill, introduced by Assemblyman Tom Harman (R), would require the CDFG to create the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement program – a program that would offer financial compensation to landowners who permit hunting on their property. Specifically, the proposal would:

- *Significantly increase killing of wildlife. While California regulations set “bag limits” for hunting of some species, there are no limits for many others. By promoting more hunting on private lands, species with no “bag limits” such as coyotes, raccoon, fox, and skunk could be killed in even greater numbers.

- *Lack adequate enforcement. AB 396 would increase the amount of land opened to hunting without providing the resources necessary to ensure hunters comply with the law. Due to the State's ever worsening budgetary crisis, the CDFG laid off 50 of its 200 wardens this year. Without money, the State will be unable to enforce hunting laws and regulations on millions of acres of private land.

- *Cost the CDFG close to half a million dollars to administer each year.

- *Not conserve habitat. Proponents of AB 396 claim the bill will help protect habitat by offering incentives to private landowners. Yet, nothing in the bill ensures that funds for the SHARE program will go directly to conservation.

- *Jeopardize imperiled species. According to a 1994 report by the General Accounting Office, over 90 percent of endangered species reside in habitat on non-federal lands, including private land. Shifting hunting onto private lands will only increase the likelihood that endangered species will be harassed or killed.

- *Disregard cumulative impacts of hunting and management activities. In the Sierra Nevada, for example, clearcutting and grazing on private lands have significantly degraded and destroyed wildlife habitat. Hunting on those lands will only exacerbate those impacts to already stressed populations of wildlife and increase the likelihood of poaching.

“AB 396 has dramatically increased the amount of land open to hunting without increasing the number of game wardens,” said Geneva Page, API's Government Affairs Coordinator. “Who will enforce hunting laws on these millions of acres of land? This bill has California set up for a substantial poaching problem.”

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**ANIMAL
PROTECTION
INSTITUTE**

API Headquarters

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 22505
Sacramento, CA
95822

Street Address:
1122 S Street
Sacramento, CA
95814

916-447-3085
1-800-348-7387
Fax 916-447-3070
info@api4animals.org
www.api4animals.org

API Affiliate

**TEXAS
SNOW MONKEY
SANCTUARY**
Dilley, TX
www.snowmonkeys.org